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The Reformed Journal

A PERIODICAL OF REFORMED COMMENT AND OPINION

TOWARD A BIBLICAL VIEW OF MARRIAGE

Leonard Verduin

WHY WE STAYED DOWNTOWN

Jacob D. Eppinga

THE CENTRALITY OF THE EARTH

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TO INFALLIBILITY

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A PUBLIC LETTER

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Letters to the Journal

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A PERIODICAL OF REFORMED COMMENT & OPINION

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In This Issue

REV. LEONARD VERDUIN discusses marriage from the Biblical point of view, and shows that marriage is not only for procreation but also for fellowship.

REV. JACOB EPPINGA tells why his congregation decided to build again in the downtown area, and in doing so he has something to say about the mission of the Church.

REV. JOHN VRIEND takes up two questions that our space age has thrust before us: (1) Is the earth central in the physical universe? (2) Is it central in the divine scheme of things?

DR. DEWEY HOITENGA JR., makes a contribution to the continuing series of articles appearing in the *Journal* on the nature of the Bible's authority. He throws the light of logical analysis upon the problem by inquiring into the formal validity of the argument from Inspiration to Infallibility.

DR. JAMES DAANE continues the discussion of the sovereignty of God that he began in the March 1960 *Journal*. He examines some elements in the theology of Professors Cornelius Van Til and John Murray, points out the dangers of defining God's sovereignty apart from His grace, and once again aligns himself with classic Reformed theology.

DR. LEWIS SMEDES writes to the Rev. J. K. van Baalen about the latter's criticism of the proposed revisions of the Reformed liturgy of the Lord's Supper, and shows why these proposals should be carefully considered.

As We See It

SANITY RESTORED

WE NOTE, without obvious chagrin, a new trend in admissions policy manifest among the great Eastern U.S. colleges and universities, dubbed in football parlance the "Ivy League." It appears that this season, at least, Ivy League admissions officers did not genuflect in the direction of Educational Testing Service's IBM computer before opening the ivy-draped portals to enterprising freshman candidates.

Besieged by 39,000 applicants for their 14,000 openings, the admissions officers had problems. The easy road was obvious: take those with highest test scores. This was, moreover, the heralded solution to the "educational bulge." But, heartening and unbelievable together, they (in the words of *Time* magazine of May 30) "admittedly made many decisions more on a subjective evaluation of a candidate than on his academic rating." Said Harvard's polite letter to unfortunate applicants who were rejected despite formidable test scores: "We believe that nonacademic factors should be of particular importance." Commented *Time*, in its first report on May 23: "Some officials see this trend as a healthy antidote to overemphasis on tests."

Having led much of the nation into the "overemphasis on tests," the Ivy League schools were to find the way out beset by thorns and brambles. The sharpest barbs sprang from the *New York Times*. Ignoring the neat and telling distinctions drawn by mechanical computers resulted, said the *Times*, in playing "blindman's buff" with college admissions. The "haphazard and chaotic conditions reigning in this year's admissions decisions," the *Times* went on, could be eliminated only if admissions were governed by a "strictly objective" standard, that is, by "an average of entrance examination scores or the like. . . ."

That this kind of appeal from the "chaos" of any democratic procedure to the neat, precise "objectivity" of mechanical, dictated, or arbitrary methods can always be employed to discredit the ways of democracy (and was so employed, for example, by Mussolini and Hitler) did not seem to occur to the editorial writers on the *Times*. But the criticism did bring a sharp response from Ivy League representatives.

Snapped President Goheen of Princeton at a press conference on the subject: "The editorial implies there are absolutely reliable measures of individual ability and achievements. At this time these measures do not exist." He added, "I think it was an ignorant editorial."

If those fond and enterprising "parents" of College Entrance Boards, the Educational Testing Service, whose home is also in the town of Princeton, winced at this, they must have shuddered at the remark of C. William Edwards, director of admissions under President Goheen. Said Edwards: "It was the most irresponsible piece of journalism I've ever seen in the *Times*. If we followed their imbecilic recommendations, we would be in a real mess."

(Shades of Dennis, what plain talk!)

The wisest words came from the Academic Director of the Millbrook School, Nathaniel Abbott, in a letter to the *Times* published May 25: "We might long for the day when test experts will devise a definitive measure which will predict a student's total performance in college; and yet in our hearts we know that no such test is possible. This is as it should be, for a 17- or 18-year-old is a complex organism, capable of growth or stagnation, of creative or unimaginative thinking, and of following right or wrong values. The boy or girl with the highest test scores does not always follow

the predicted path in college or in life. Each has his own timetable and his own capacity for growth."

That *every* child, bearing *his own* imprint of the image of God, should be infinitely complex and infinitely a *particular*; and that for evaluating human capacities in these *particulars* no diagnostic test will ever be adequate; and that "this is as it should be. . ." — why were not "*we*," Christian friend, the ones who proclaimed this in season and out to all who would listen? Why, indeed, are we not proclaiming what is, in fact, the practice in the college I know best, that increased educational *demand* can only be responsibly met by increased educational *opportunity*. Christian education cannot be absolved from this responsibility, by one test, by ten, or by all the tests there are.

—L.D.K.

SHERLOCK-UP-TO-DATE?

THE FAMOUS (or shall one choose, rather, to say *infamous*, *notorious*, *victorious*, depending perhaps upon which accounts he has been reading) "spy-plane" incident has hardly yet surrendered front-news space to murders, thefts, accidents, and other equally significant events. Nor has the world itself settled back to normalcy.

"U 2 day" may achieve a rating with "V" days, if the public relations experts earn their substantial salaries, or it may finally carry into history that aura of gloom that probably envelops Mr. Powers' lonely cell in Moscow.

In a way, the plight of Powers lies closer to that of most of us than any other facet of the whole affair. He, and we, fell victim to designs not of his own making.

Politics has become to a surprising degree the manipulation of images in the popular mind, images bearing little or no necessary relation to the realities of national life. This may be illustrated in many ways. Take the case of Sputnik, or the persistent resignations of experts frustrated by inadequacies in our own effort to eclipse Sputnik. Each of these crises was metamorphosed by the expert until it took on the aspect of another U.S. victory. The public relations staff always rose to the occasion. That is, until May Day, 1960.

Obliged then, as never before, to operate with one ear tuned to national reaction and one ear tuned to international reaction, the apparatus developed schizophrenia. Stories that rang true at home were exploded abroad. Explanations that assured Americans that Mr. Powers had achieved a notable penetration of Soviet defenses were repudiated at Paris. Assertions that so good a spy-game as this would continue were firmly made and as firmly swallowed in the face of aghast allies.

Meantime, what of Mr. Powers?

Nay more, meantime what of us all?

Were we, like Powers, pawns in the deadly game? Were the half-truths given so glibly out of Washington intended to fool Mr. K? or intended to fool us? We do not have, it so happens, all the means that Mr. K. possesses to sift wheat from chaff in propaganda. We have to rest our confidence in the assurance that, on most occasions, the fibs come out of Moscow and the truth out of Washington.

In espionage, when things go awry the spy is the loser. In a democracy, when propaganda is deliberately set to obscure the real issues of national life, the people are the losers. If both parties will learn from this incident that, whatever we may tell Mr. K., the American people *deserve the truth*, the best of the matter is still to come.

And if, in the coming campaign, the techniques associated with the sale of soap are carefully restricted to the sale of *soap*, Americans will acquire by facing the stark realities of national and international life an awareness and stature that will be felt around the world. Both we and the world need nothing more desperately than just such an experience.

—L.D.K.

A "SENSE OF HUMOR"

THERE IS, one finds, that kind of men who have a knack of taking their cause in dead earnest while taking themselves with a grain or two of salt. And there is, one finds, that kind of men who have not such a knack.

This distinction comes to mind as one reads this year, as each year, the articles written on the issues facing Synod, 1960, of the Christian Reformed Church.

The ability to distinguish oneself and his own willfulness from the worth of the cause he advocates might be called having a *sense of humor*.

Viewed thus, it might be said that one's *laughter* is about others, while one's *humor* resides in his attitude toward himself. An almost infallible clue, then, as to whether one tends to take *himself* too seriously in the process of defending whatever *cause* he espouses is the measure of the sense of humor which characterizes himself and, also, his writing.

For its presence, or absence, shows in what one writes. Tempered by humor, one can evidence a willingness to listen to his opponent with open ear and heart. But the humorless controversialist allows no options but his own, admits no possible alternatives except those he poses, conceives of no perspective but those which (perhaps unbeknownst to him) govern his own conclusions. Humor implies, notice, *no less* devotion to one's own understanding of his cause, but it *adds* the capacity to entertain (however grudgingly) the notion that another view may also be defensible, is at least worth a hearing, and could in fact embody the will of God.

Humorless debate, you have noticed no doubt, really gets nowhere because it consists in firing verbal broadsides across an infinite chasm of irreconcilable difference. A sense of humor would help make such a chasm finite, and might bridge it. The humorless controversialist persuades only the already persuaded; in truth, he writes only to these. When he mentions his opponent, it is to write, not *to* him, but *about* him. Humor reverses the situation. Such a writer hopes to persuade, to find common ground with, to meet at last in some harmony-in-differences, those with whom he initially disagrees, assuming the broad foundation for such harmony exists or may be found.

Because the humorless controversialist cannot distinguish

between himself and his cause, he does not draw any distinction between his opponent and *his* cause. Debate crumbles into discussion of, and attack upon, the other person. Differences are made heresies, and the "differer" a heretic. Reconciliation becomes difficult, and, viewed from the humorless perspective, undesirable or impossible.

It happens, in humorless debate, that the *truth* of Love gets obscured by the "love" for Truth. That is, the humorless one's personal "love" for the Truth blinds him to the rules which Love lays down for argument. A veritable catalog might be compiled of the devices humorless argument employs in defense of the Truth!

"But what then?" inquires a humorless friend, steelily, "Out with it! You want me to hold my innermost convictions lightly, prey to every wind that blows like the weathercock!"

Shall one say, "Yes, sir," with a twinkle in the eye, just to watch the temperature rise across the table?

No, but do consider for a moment a weathercock. The instrument depends upon a *very stable axis*, does it not, if it is to be a *true* guide to wind direction. It can truly discern what it has been made to proclaim only if it stands secure, and then only if it does not willfully seek to impose its preference on the true wind direction. Change occurs, not according to the whim or weakness of the weathercock, but in the fact of wind direction.

It is, in short, the wind and not the cock that counts; and, presumably, a good weathercock surmises this.

Would that we all could do likewise, in so far as the analogy holds.

It is the truth, and not our personalized view of it, that really matters in the world. If we are secure at our axis, we can be prepared to list to the winds that blow, seeking obediently to discern and reflect the truth in them. And that secure axis we do possess; or better, it doth us possess. It is the certain knowledge, in Christ Jesus our Lord, that *God's will is getting done in the world*, and our business, in life and in the realm of debate, is to point true to that will. And herein lies the root of a *sense of humor*.

God's purposes are en route to fruition; it may be through us (God grant), it may be around us, it may be over us, it may be despite us; probably it is all of these, at one time this and at another time that. Humor *rises* in knowing that this is so; in reflecting upon our own successes and failures in sensing true wind direction. Humor *results* in the pervasive recognition that in the manifold of life, the wind that blows from our opponent's corner may be, in this particular matter, God's own sweet breeze against which we are trying in vain to point out another direction.

True it is, and worthy of careful note, that at the moment we may not, indeed, know at once that thus the wind of God is blowing today. And so we struggle on to advocate the truth *as we do understand it*, but now we "fight" with a sense of humor. And there is good hope that humor will open our eyes and hearts to the truth which once was obscure.

As we learn more not to fear God's losing, we can with more equanimity envision our own. As we learn not to suppose that we have taken full possession of the only direction from which God's winds may blow, we can in good humor be prepared to heed the direction He has chosen in the matter under discussion. By humor, then, one is not the less persuaded of God's infallibility, but he is the more prepared to act upon the denial of his own.

And this is great gain.

We all, as brethren in one true Church, are stewards of much that our world desperately needs, NOW. Like members of a family we use the broad foundations which bind us together as the arena, too often, for *disputes* we could not even conduct without our community of beliefs and practices. These wasteful *disputes* will become useful *discussions*, and these *discussions* will draw us all closer together, and fit us for greater service to our world, just to the extent that they are conducted with a *sense of humor*, based on the sure knowledge of *our brotherhood* in this one great truth: if He be for us, who can be against us!

—L.D.K.

Toward A Biblical View of Marriage

by Leonard Verduin

IT HAS BEEN URGED in this journal that in the Christian system truth is an ellipse, i.e., that in the Christian system every thesis has its complementary thesis, so that if you draw a line around the two you get an ellipse rather than a circle. A warning was sounded against building a system around a single point, against all circular constructions. (See the *Reformed Journal* for October 1959.)

In the present article we shall attempt to show that in regard to marriage we must likewise think in terms of an ellipse and not in terms of a circle. This is because the Bible itself supplies the two

focal points around which the ellipse is to be drawn. The two are given in the opening chapters of Genesis, where we have two accounts as to what it was that prompted the Creator to make man male and female. These two accounts set before us the *raison d'être* (the reason for existing) of the husband-wife combination.

LET US LOOK at the account in Genesis 1 first. Here we read of a divine soliloquy that preceded the creation of man. We read, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have domin-

ion. . . .” Then follows the assertion that God did as He had contemplated: “And God created man in his own image . . . male and female created he them.” The account ends with a sort of divine send-off for Adam and Eve: “And God blessed them: and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion. . . .” In this passage the *raison d'être* of the husband-wife relationship is procreation, the begetting of an offspring numerous enough to reach the desired end of subduing the earth. In this account marriage is for fertility.

Turning now to the second account, in Genesis 2, we find again a divine soliloquy: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a help meet for him.” Again there follows the report that God did as contemplated: “And Jehovah God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs . . . and the rib, which Jehovah God had taken from the man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.” We are told that upon this the man said: “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called *Ishah*, because she was taken out of *Ish*.” The account concludes with the philosophic remark (whether by God or by Adam is not apparent; it makes no difference for our present purpose) that because of this one-fleshedness a man shall “leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” In this account an other and a different *raison d'être* for the husband-wife combination is set forth. Not a word here about that theme that was so prominent in the report of Genesis 1, not a word here about any procreation. In this second account the *raison d'être* of marriage is said to be — fellowship. Here it is an I-Thou relationship (to borrow Martin Buber’s telling phrase), whereby two human beings of opposite sex complement each other, that is the divine objective. Here the interplay of personality is the *raison d'être* of marriage, a kind of confluence of persons, a confluence of which the physical commingling of one-fleshedness is at once the symbol and the medium. In this account marriage is declared to be for fellowship.¹

It is to be noted in this connection that in an earlier verse of this account in which the purpose of sexual differentiation is located in fellowship we read: “And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” It is in this breathing-in that man becomes a personality-having creature, in possession of a “living soul.” By this infusion man comes to stand apart

from all the animals. These animals all have their mates, their counterparts; but for Adam (now a personality-having being) there is as yet no such counterpart. To remedy this situation, by giving man a mate likewise possessed of personality, the rib procedure is invented. Now interplay of person is provided for. It is therefore not at all surprising that when the writer of Genesis 2 reverts to the man-woman combination he reverts also to the personality-serving aspect of the marriage relation. With man a new dimension is achieved, the dimension of personality on the creatural level; small wonder that in man sex takes on a new dimension, the dimension that we for the sake of aliteration have called the fellowship-motif.

These then are the two focal points and this then is the ellipse: marriage as a device unto fertility; and marriage as a device unto fellowship. Marriage in the authentic Christian vision is a matter of both-and. It follows, if a bit of application is in order so early in the sermon, that if we say “marriage is a device unto procreation” we are uttering something which, at best, is a half-truth. At its worst it is to reduce the human sex act to its pre-human counterpart; it is to speak bestially of man. That sounds ominous. It is.

WE ARE IN POSITION now to bring into focus certain features that are peculiar to human sexuality. We shall find, if we look closely at general revelation in the matter, that the book of nature tells essentially the same story that the book of redemption tells. Genesis 2 tells us that with the creation of *homo sapiens*, with the emergence of creatural personality that is, sex picks up a new dimension; and the book of nature gives us to see this same something-new-added-to.

On the animal level sexual activity is restricted to a mating season. Here sexual interest and contact is geared to an ovulation cycle. It is limited to the moment during which a fertilizable ovum is present. On this level of existence sexual activity is at once cancelled out by the advent of pregnancy. For all practical purposes sex ceases to exist whenever and wherever the sex act would carry in it no promise of population increase. We may say, indeed, that on the animal level sex is a device unto reproduction, with no more said.

But in the creature called man a new set of conditions present themselves at the sexual front. Here sexual interest is not bound to any ovulation cycle; it extends into the “barren” periods that lie between ovulations. In man sexual activity is not contingent upon the presence of a fertilizable ovum. Moreover, on the level of man the advent of pregnancy does not *per se* cancel out sexual activity; indeed, there seems to be clinical evidence that in some instances complete sexual maturity is not reached by the

1. The Hebrew term *k'negdo* which is translated “meet for him” means “fit for him,” “at his side,” “over against him.” In either case the point is that of “suitable counterpart” or “proper complement.” There is therefore beautiful symbolism in the representation that *Ishah* was fashioned from a rib of *Ish*, from his costal region.

woman until her first pregnancy has begun.² It may be said that, normally, sexual interest carries over into the post-conceptive period. And finally, although in man there is a rather abrupt and quite conclusive termination of female fertility, in the so-called menopause, this development does not *per se* write *finis* to a woman's sexual career. Again there seems to be clinical evidence that in some cases full-orbed sexuality on the part of woman dates from the time of her graduation from the procreative class.³ All this points up the fact that in the human species there is a new dimension, an elongation of sexual behavior, whereby it reaches into areas where it cannot be of service in the procreative undertaking. And this is exactly what the Bible's representation of the *raison d'être* of sex would lead us to expect.

The question could be asked, indeed has been asked, whether the two motivations for sexual differentiation, the motivation of fertility and the motivation of fellowship, stand in relationship to each other of primary and secondary. Must we perhaps speak of a major and a minor, the major being marriage-is-for-fertility and the minor being marriage-is-for-fellowship? Something has been made of the fact that the fertility-motif is mentioned *first* in the Bible, so getting a sort of priority. To this it may be replied that although the account of Genesis 2 stands *later* in our Bibles, in all probability it reflects an *earlier* tradition.⁴ Personally we prefer not to speak of primary and secondary in this matter.

Of this we may be sure, that the Scriptures in their entirety attest very emphatically to the complete propriety of the fellowship-purpose of marriage; the Good Book which at the outset calls sexual differentiation a device unto fellowship of person continues true to this insight. We read the touching words of Elkanah as he seeks to comfort Hannah in the frustration of childlessness: "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart so sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?" — an argument that can only mean that this marriage was eminently successful even though in it the procreative function remained unserved. We read in the Old Testament the very humane provision whereby the newly-wedded man was excused temporarily from military duty, "to be free at home one year to be happy with the wife whom he has taken." Then there is the Wisdom literature which advises man to "re-

joice in the wife of your youth, a lovely hind, a graceful doe. Let her affection fill you at all times with delight, be infatuated always with her love!" And what of the Song of Songs — whatever may be its canonical task, it makes no difference in our present purpose — in which sex for the sake of the ultimate in human companionship is lauded in terms that have never been excelled in the world's literature. The New Testament also knows no restraint in its reverence for the marital contact as a device unto the interplay of personality; it pictures the inter-personal relationship of Christ and those who are His under the simile of bridegroom and bride. So impressed were the writers of the New Testament with the utter propriety of the fellowship-motif in marriage that they pictured the hereafter, that never-ending interplay of personality between God and the redeemed, as a marriage feast of the Lamb and His redeemed bride! All this imagery would, we submit, be out of place and impossible if indeed marriage is properly and exhaustively defined as a device unto procreation.

NO DOUBT THE LORD our God has juxtaposed the two accounts in Genesis with their mutually complementary statements as to the *raison d'être* of sex because He knew that men have a way of putting asunder that which God has joined together. No doubt He put these two statements as to the divine motivation regarding human sexuality so close together in order that men might speak elliptically and not circularly of sex.

Would to God men had taken heed! What an endless ocean of human tragedy that would have obviated! And what an asset it would be to us who must defend the faith if we could be spared the task of detaching the authentic Christian philosophy of sex from that of "historic" Christianity! How much our apologetic burden would be lightened if we could somehow in the matter in hand divest ourselves of "historic" Christianity!⁵

For the sad fact is that in "historic" Christianity one encounters, almost constantly, a less than Christian view of sexuality. In the patristic writings the essentially pagan notion is constantly defended that sexual activity, even within the marriage bond, is an unworthy traffic, sinful in itself, an act that puts its perpetrators in the red morally. The corollary then is that one can again get out of the red by shouldering the inconveniences of parenthood. This is a thoroughly unacceptable piece of theology; for it calls bad that which God declared to be "good," even "very good."⁶ To say, as did Ignatius (a first-century churchman) that the "blessed saints" who

2. This phenomenon may have its explanation in the fact that at this point concern over consequences is no longer a factor.

3. What was said in footnote 2 applies here too.

4. On the strength of this consideration Rabbi Mihaly says, in his book *Marriage and Family Life*: "Procreation is undoubtedly a fulfillment in marriage, but love and companionship is no less a primary purpose. Eve was created to be a 'helpmeet' to Adam since 'it is not good for man to be alone' and only later were they commanded 'to be fruitful and multiply'."

5. Because Christianity as a manifestation in history and Christianity as set forth in the divine blue-print of the Bible are always quite distinguishable, it is not good policy to identify oneself with "historic" Christianity.

6. Because it is this vicious theology that has dictated the Catholic attitude toward birth control, a really Biblical attitude in this matter will differ from the Catholic.

had been married were not blameworthy "because they entered into these marriages not for the sake of appetite but out of regard for the propagation of mankind" is to posit a false antithesis, a totally unbiblical one, one that can only send men in a hopelessly wrong direction. It so happens that what Ignatius vilified as an "unworthy appetite" is by our God called desirable and good. When another of the *patres* asserts that with Christians "the procreation of children is the measure of our indulgence in appetite" he is operating with a neoplatonic set of values and he has turned his back upon the plain teachings of Scripture. When Clement of Alexandria condemns sexual congress for purposes other than the procreation of children, calling it "an injury to nature," he is quite out of touch with the only good source of Christian morality, the Bible. When Augustine of Hippo lambasts the Manicheans for employing the rhythm method of controlling parenthood, seeing that this admits sexual activity which does not serve the procreative end, then Augustine is worse than the people from whom he has distanced himself. It is not at all strange that a man with such weird ideas of sex made a hopeless mess of his own sexuality. (He had lived, as will be recalled, with a mistress, by whom he had gendered an illegitimate child.) He writes circularly about marriage; and that is to write of man as though he had not been raised to a higher level. This paganism vitiates to this day the whole Catholic morality as it pertains to sex. Through it all runs the assumption that "procreation is the only positive purpose of sex." This erroneous assumption has given rise to what has been called the "fertility cult" of Catholicism.⁷

When Pope Pius XI says, in his bull *Casti Connubii*, that "the principle end of marriage is laid down in the beginning by God in the words 'Increase and multiply'" he is being wiser than God; for the Bible, His book, does not know the hierarchy of "principle end" and "subsidiary end." To sum it all up, as recent Catholic writers themselves put it: "For over twelve centuries the general teaching of the church was that sexual intercourse between married persons becomes sinful once the woman has conceived. Procreation alone was the purpose and justification of sex." This means that for twelve centuries Catholicism has been off the beam. And that implies that another Reformation is urgently needed.

THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION, it must be granted, although reluctantly, did little to set men's house in order as to the *raison d'être* of sex. Generally speaking the circular view of marriage was left unchallenged. As a modern Protestant scholar puts

it: "For all practical purposes, the ethos of Wittenberg and Geneva was as strongly pro-fertility as was that of Rome." And to this day in many areas of Protestantism the circular view of marriage, which feeds the "fertility cult," continues; one continues to hear it said that "marriage is for procreation, and any sexual traffic that does not serve this purpose is vicious."⁸

In American Protestantism, however, a movement, beginning a couple of decades ago, gives promise that at long last the elliptical view of marriage is on the way back. The Committee on Marriage and Home, of the Federal Council of Churches, put out a Report, in 1931, in which it is said that marital intimacies "have their origin in the thought and purpose of God, first for the creation of human life, but also as a manifestation of divine concern for the happiness of those who have so wholly merged their lives." This Report urges that marital congress is "also an expression of mutual affection, without relation to procreation." Since that time of pioneering much has been done to recover the "second dimension" of marriage, the dimension so prominently featured in Genesis 2. Otto Piper at Princeton Seminary, in his book *The Christian Interpretation of Sex*, has done much to give back to marriage an "independent status for marital 'knowledge' apart from procreation." As a result, it would seem, of this pioneering toward a truly Biblical view of marriage and the *raison d'être* of sex, the Church of Sweden stated, in 1951, in a pastoral letter: "Every marriage where husband and wife do not want children has a wrong aim; but the child is not the only purpose. The meaning of marriage is above all to be a communion between man and woman. Sexual intercourse between married couples may be an ample sign of this communion although due to special circumstances it might be necessary to avoid pregnancy." And the Report on *The Family in Contemporary Society*, prepared for the Lambeth Conference of 1958, carries this fine statement, fine because biblical "In human beings coitus is more than a device for reproduction; it is a complex experience, the purpose of which may be described as conceptional and relational" (The words "conceptional" and "relational" connote the fertility-motif and the fellowship-motif respectively).

Was it perhaps this Protestant pioneering toward a full-orbed Christian view of sex that led Pope Pius XI to say in *Casti Connubii* that "this mutual inward molding of husband and wife, this determined effort to perfect each other, can . . .

7. Richard M. Fagley, in his recent book on *The Population Explosion and Christian Responsibility* says that the "fertility cult" is strong "chiefly in U.S. Catholic circles"; and he adds (this will interest the readers of this journal) that these U.S. Catholic circles "find a kindred spirit among some of the Dutch theologians, I understand."

8. Many years ago the writer, in a discussion with a prominent elder, had occasion to refer to the phenomenon (discussed above) of human sexuality extending into "barren" areas. The elder countered with: "But that is one of the results of the Fall!" At another time a prominent clergyman, when the subject of post-conceptional marital intimacy was mentioned, insisted that such coition nevertheless served the cause of reproduction since it — *mirabile dictu* — serves the foetus alimentally!

be the chief purpose of matrimony"? This passage has led some Catholic writers to say that "the personal and relational elements in marriage are at least equal in importance to the genetic." It must be said, however, that Pius XII, seemingly alarmed at the liberalizing ferment men had discovered in *Casti Connubii*, returned to the idea, and the language, of the ancient circular view of marriage, speaking again of procreation as the "primary

end" of marriage. It will be interesting to watch the performance of the new pope; will he be influenced by the new Reformation as it seeks to reshape to the contours of the Bible the church's thinking on the matter of sex?

And it will be interesting to watch the trend in the circles served by this journal. That we have far to go, or, at least had far to go, seems to be beyond cavil.

Why We Stayed Downtown*

by J. D. Eppinga

THE NAME "GRAND RAPIDS" means different things to different people. To some it stands for quality furniture. Others conceive of it as the gateway to northern Michigan's water wonderland. To some it is just a city of churches, or the center of religious publications; while to others it is the headquarters of the Christian Reformed denomination, or simply the Dutchman's Jerusalem. But to me, Grand Rapids does not mean any of these things, or all of them put together, so much as it means simply a city. An American city with an approximate population of 200,000 people representing not only various races and nationalities and economic standards, but also individuals in need of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That all of them do not have this gospel, and that those who have it do not always live up to its implications, is immediately apparent from any reading of its daily newspaper. For Grand Rapids, too, has its crime and delinquency, its broken homes, and a divorce rate which is at least the equal of the highest in the land. It is not the worst community in the United States. There are, in fact, those who consider it to be the best, or nearly so. But even its biggest boosters will have to admit that it is a city made with hands — human hands and human minds — and therefore it, too, is marked by all the failings of a fallen human race.

It is in this city that my congregation — the LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church — has stood in its "downtown" location for approximately seventy-five years. During this period of three quarters of a century, it has faithfully proclaimed the gospel of salvation not only in a changing world, but also in a changing community — for Grand Rapids, too, has been growing. And growth for any city means not only a filling of the outskirts, but an emptying, or at least a change in character, of the "insskirts."

It is an unfortunate fact of life — of city life —

that the advent of suburbia, and the suburban mentality, has as its counterpart that which has come to be known as "inner city blight." Consequently, the LaGrave Church finds itself today in an environment totally different from the surroundings which existed at the time of its organization. Whereas in days gone by it was the geographical center of its membership, it is today bordered on one side by a downtown area which is in trouble, and bordered on the other side by a neighborhood which, though it represents only 15 percent of the land area of the city, nevertheless contains 30 percent of its dwelling units, 55 percent of its adult crime, 75 percent of its delinquency, and 75 percent of its multiple family problems. It is an area which costs the city eight dollars for every dollar it gives.

Recently I had the privilege of spending a night out with the police department in our city. I rode the night shift from 11 to 7, in the back seat of a patrol car, accompanying the lieutenant on his nightly tour of duty. It turned out to be quite an eventful experience. Trouble calls came in all night, and many of them originated in the general area in which the LaGrave Church is situated. There were family fights to investigate, assaults, disturbers of the peace to apprehend, break-ins, and ladies of the evening to keep moving. An all-night combination fruit stand and market, only four blocks from our church, was robbed. The footprints of the thief were traceable in the freshly fallen snow. Eventually these tracks led to a house nearby where everything seemed peaceful. But when we entered, we found some twenty-five people who had been gambling all night, and drinking too. We also found the robber hiding in an upstairs closet — a man who had gambled his money and lost. He had left this place sometime before to pick up some easy cash with the aid of a knife. He was apprehended, of course, and brought to headquarters.

I mention this incident not to impress you with this preacher's feats of derring-do, for actually I

* This address was given at one of the meetings of the National Association of Evangelicals which recently convened in Chicago, Illinois.

was only an observer, sometimes a rather frightened one who made sure that he stood at all times behind his protector — the wonderful lieutenant, who seemed to know just what to do in every situation. But I do mention this experience to give you somewhat of a picture of the character of the neighborhood which lies to the south of 107 LaGrave, which is the location of my church.

IN THIS SETTING the congregation faced a problem quite apart from the problem of its neighborhood. It felt itself to be inadequately housed. Because the sanctuary could seat little more than half of the membership of over 1100, overflow crowds had to be seated elsewhere on the premises. This was discouraging to attendance. Some came early to assure themselves a place, while others who came later had to be content with being ushered elsewhere. For many children, Sunday after Sunday, the minister was no more than a speaker-box hanging on the wall. Furthermore, the building was in bad repair, therefore expendable. It was in this situation that the congregation faced a number of alternatives. It could do nothing about its problem, in which case, in all likelihood, the congregation would deteriorate into a dying church in a dying neighborhood. This appealed to very few. Another possibility, the inauguration of multiple services during the morning hour, also had its serious drawbacks. A Study Committee reported that this would be harmful to the Sunday-school program, in view of the over-all limitation of facilities. It would fracture the unity of the congregation, which would no longer be worshipping together, and it would still leave the congregation with all the problems of an aged building.

A third alternative — that of moving out into the suburbs where the bulk of the membership resides — had its appeal. There would be adequate parking facilities and we would be located in a better neighborhood. Following the general trend of moving to the suburbs, which seemed a logical thing to do, also presented its problems. Not all the members lived in the same section of the city; therefore the choice of a location would be difficult. A further complicating factor was the consideration that most of the suburban areas were already being served by churches of ours, and of other denominations. And so, added to these three possibilities, the congregation presented itself with a fourth alternative — that of building anew on its present site.

Of the possibilities open to the congregation, the last named, that of building anew on its present site, seemed the most foolish of them all. Why invest a great sum of money in a piece of unsellable real estate in a run-down neighborhood? Yet this alternative was chosen. What seemed on the surface to be an unwise decision to make, after much thought, prayer, and reflection, appeared to be the

move that God might want, and the decision which God might bless. Consequently, the congregation held its last service in the old building on the last Sunday in May 1959. It will move, God willing, into its new sanctuary sometime in June 1960. A new church on an old site. Why?

A SHORT TIME AGO, on Palm Sunday afternoon, thirty-six teams went out from the congregation to canvass the neighborhood, making some seven hundred calls. It was interesting to note how many of the local residents, living in their rooms and apartments, in commenting on our building project, asked the question: "Why are you building here? Why are you staying in this neighborhood?" It is a question that I have encountered again and again in meeting people. What is the rationale behind our staying? Why did the membership choose as it did?

In a sense I cannot answer the question. I don't believe there is a minister anywhere who can always tell why his congregation votes a certain way. Only God can see the hearts of His people. Clergymen cannot. I can give some high-sounding reasons for our having stayed, and I will. But if I present my material only in this vein, I should not be keeping faith with you. Therefore, let me say again that I cannot tell all the reasons why my church voted six to one to stay. I do know that I have a wonderful congregation, which is deeply committed to the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ. It manifests the spirit of the love of the Master within the membership, and to its pastor, and to those outside. There is a desire that all of its decisions be made both thoughtfully and prayerfully. Even so, however, it must be realized that all did not vote for "staying," very likely for the same reasons. Some, no doubt, were motivated more by practical considerations, while others processed their thinking along other lines. It is apparent, therefore, that any listing of reasons that I might give would not be complete. As we said a moment ago, there appeared, among others, also some deep and profound reasons for remaining where we were. Let me limit myself to these. I present them not necessarily in the order of their importance.

May I say, then, that we stayed because there is value in continuing to be known as a downtown church. American society as a whole has of late given increased recognition to the church as a significant factor in the community and at large. This was not so true even twenty-five years ago. Whatever the reasons may be, churches today have been clothed with a new dignity. This does not necessarily mean that America has turned to God, but it does mean that in the present context it is important that there be not only neighborhood churches, but also downtown churches which are of evangelical persuasion, to capitalize on present opportunities. For downtown churches today often

have presented to them opportunities for witness which neighborhood churches do not. Many community efforts today represent projects in which churches are asked to co-operate, especially downtown churches. There are hotel conventions, service club activities, urban renewal committees, sociological studies, health interests, YMCA efforts, community rehabilitation projects — the list is endless in which churches are asked to take a part. So often these churches are downtown churches of liberal complexion, theologically speaking. It is important, then, that all over America the heralds of the gospel be strategically placed. This means neighborhood churches. It also means downtown churches! We must have both! This consideration then may be presented as one reason why LaGrave has stayed where it was. Downtown.

But let me give a second reason, which in a sense grows out of the first. It is to say that representatives of the evangelical faith do not always give the aforementioned reasoning the proper weight that it deserves. Recently I heard a speech given by Dr. Donald Bouma, chairman of the Sociology Department of Calvin College, which had as its astonishing title, "How Churches Are Contributing to Juvenile Delinquency." In this speech Professor Bouma declared that churches are contributing to criminality by being so typically middle class. They move out of communities in time of change. They don't stay to meet the religious needs of the changing core of a city. Thus we have run-down areas where churches have pulled out, leaving them without any religious center. The Roman Catholics, he said, have done an outstanding job in this respect. They do not pull out.

He went on to state in this same connection that churches often lack the courage to live up to their own sociological pronouncements against segregation and racial problems. They are fearful of the social implications of religion, and so move away from such problems rather than face them. And so churches become irrelevant to the situation around them. They become too otherworldly orientated to apply themselves to what is going on in this one. Thus they know about the Israelites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, and the Girgishites, but they know so little about the Americanites. This whole situation, says Professor Bouma, is the church's contribution to criminality and delinquency.

For a convocation of ministers, this was a shocking speech. It was also a necessary one. Too many churches today are moving out of their neighborhoods where the hunting is poor, or where it is difficult, to where it is better. Dr. Ronald E. Osborn, Professor of Church History at Butler University School of Religion in Indianapolis, in his recent book entitled, *The Spirit of American Christianity*, makes the same point. He says the Roman Catholic Church stays "nailed down." "It continues to serve the changing stream of humanity

that flows by a particular spot" (p. 125). He continues by saying that the flight of the churches from great areas of urban blight is a shame to American Protestantism" (p. 126). In moving to the suburbs almost en masse, it thereby shows, he says, "that it seeks to be ministered unto rather than to minister It would feed on a community rather than serve it" (p. 125).

Did you ever hear the story of the drunk who was crawling on his hands and knees downtown beneath a street light? An officer came up to him and said, "What are you doing?" He replied, "I'm looking for my ring." "Well," said the officer, "where did you lose it?" "Two blocks down," replied the drunk. "Then why are you looking for it here?" asked the policeman. "Well," said the inebriated one, "it's so dark two blocks down. The light is much better here."

Maybe this is a parable. So often we build our churches not where souls are lost and where the houses of God are needed most, but where the light is best, where the lawns are wide, and where the parking space is adequate.

Let me say that I realize that the story does not hold up as an illustration all the way. Souls are lost everywhere. Therefore, we need churches in all places. But surely, also in the less desirable areas. When on our recent canvass to which I alluded earlier, a lady asked, "But why are you building here?" the answer was, among other reasons, "For you!"

AND SO WE HAVE STAYED to remain a downtown church, and to partake of whatever advantages for witness this label brings. Furthermore, we have stayed, for there is already a sizable enough move to the suburbs and this movement is not abating. And thirdly, we have stayed (and maybe this third reason is merely a restatement of some things we have already said) to deepen, to foster the parish concept of our work and witness. There is a desire to build our communion not just on the basis of some social or economic or national homogeneity, but also on the basis of a geographical spot inhabited by us already for seventy-five years. If, in the providence of God, LaGrave came to be situated on its present site, and if during the years the neighborhood has metamorphosed into a very needy one, then who knows but that God looks down and with His aerial view of our city says, "I am pleased to see so many spires in the suburbs, but remember also to maintain my embassies in the inner city. For if you don't, the inner cities will become jungles indeed." And so we will make our difficult neighborhood our parish. And we are confident that if we will remain loyal to the gospel, and diligent in presenting it to the lost who live within the shadow of our spire, as well as to the community at large, God will keep us as a congregation, and make us to be vital and to be strong.

The Centrality of the Earth

by John Vriend

CAPE CANAVERAL and its equivalent somewhere in Russia have done more than launch missiles and man-made moons into space. They have launched all of us — mankind — irrevocably into the Age of Space. On its long trek from the Stone Age, through the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the Machine Age, and the Atomic Age, mankind now stands upon the threshold of a new, exciting, and most challenging Age: that in which the immeasurable ocean of space, containing innumerable "island universes," may be explored, visited perhaps, conquered never, but certainly brought closer to us.

In our imaginations at least, if not by occupation, we shall all be astronauts. But before this great push into unknown regions we cannot help asking ourselves a number of questions. Professor Martin J. Heineken, in his book *God in the Space Age*, fills thirteen pages with these space-inspired questions, and a number of tentative "answers" to them (pp. 190-203). But he is not alone in asking them. Will man be permitted to leave the planetary home on which he was born? Will he meet other creatures on Venus or Mars? Will the wars which plague our planet now spread to other celestial bodies? Shall we, if we travel far enough and often enough, stumble on the abode of the angels called heaven?

In this article I wish to concentrate on a question which has been with us a long time but which has now gained a new urgency. It concerns the centrality of the earth. For us the question resolves itself into two: (1) Does our present knowledge of the physical universe permit us to speak of the earth as in any way its central body? (2) Does the Bible require us to speak of the earth as occupying a central "place" in the cosmic scheme of things?

The Evolution of Cosmologies

The thrust of the first question may be best illustrated, I think, by giving a penny-sized sketch of its history. For many long centuries there was no doubt at all in the minds of sane men that the earth, the only body they could observe at arms' length, was central. Its prominence, if not its centrality, is already evident in the world-image of an ancient tribe in India. This image pictured the earth as a huge tea-tray laid across the backs of three elephants that are standing on the hard shell of an enormous turtle. Whether any metaphysical anxiety accompanied the acceptance of this fanciful acrobatic image is not known to this writer.

Closer to our Western minds is the popular picture of the universe as it was current in ancient

Babylonia and the Near East. In this picture the earth was a flat, cylindrically shaped object, like a Gouda cheese, surrounded and supported by water. The cheese was hollow, however, and the water within was connected to the land by means of springs. Still further within the bowels of the earth was Sheol, the abode of the dead. Above the earth was the firmament, a solid dome, standing on pillars and providing the background against which moved the sun, moon, and planets. There are hints of this world-image in the popular and poetic language of the Bible when it speaks of heaven above, the earth beneath, and the water under the earth (Ex. 20:4; cf. Phil. 2:10). It was a three-story universe, with the earth as the habitable ground floor. In this pre-scientific picture there was no doubt that the earth was central.

The first scientific view of the structure of the universe was that of Aristotle. He, along with other Greeks, the Pythagoreans for instance, taught that the earth was a sphere (before Columbus men knew of the sphericity of the earth from moon-eclipses) stationed solidly at the center of the universe, while the moon, the sun, and the five planets, each described a circular course around the earth. The stars were all fixed to a sphere concentric with the earth. If a body did not seem to rotate properly around the immobile center of things, it moved in an epicycle — a circle the center of which itself moved in a circle around the earth. Thus the Greeks from Thales down to Ptolemy were convinced that the earth was the unmoving center of the world.

This view of the world, the Ptolemaic world-view, ruled the minds of men for over fourteen centuries. Then arose the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), a contemporary of the great Reformers of the sixteenth century, who made the astounding claim, upsetting all past experience, imagination, observation, and calculation, that the earth is in motion and that its path runs around the sun. The earth was forever deposed from its favored position and, owing to the work of Copernicus, his celebrated Italian disciple Galileo, and others, a sun-centered view of the world gained the assent of men of science.

The next great period for cosmology was the Newtonian Era, in which the sun itself was demoted from its recently won position of glory and was recognized as a relatively minor member of that great system of stars known as the Milky Way.

Today, thanks to higher mathematics, bigger and better telescopes, and other factors, we have the

super-image in which our own galaxy must be content to take its place as only one of perhaps 1,000,000,000 similar systems within range of telescopic vision. "The search for a fixed centre of the universe as a natural point of reference resulted in a shifting by stages from the geocentric position adopted by theology and early science to ever more distant objects, finally only to dissolve in the realization that there is no intrinsic distinction discernible between any one region of the nebular universe and any other" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1957, Volume 6, p. 502c, Article "Cosmology").

So we arrive at the conclusion that the earth on which we live is a wee mite of a planet swirling around a third-rate star called the sun. This sun is itself somewhere on the outer fringe of a galaxy called the Milky Way. This Milky Way is only one of a gigantic collection of — but why go on? The imagination staggers under the impact of the figures. It is enough to note that the earth has nothing like discernible centrality. It has become a flyspeck — somewhere but where? — on the map of the universe.

Sobering Reflections

What are we to say to this?

In the first place, it is crude, not to say nonsensical, to measure the significance of the earth by its relative size. There may be men of science, though I can hardly believe it, who will despise the earth because they despise smallness, as children may glorify the earth because they glorify bigness. It is enough to observe that the earth has always been big enough, and more than big enough, to serve the needs of mankind, even if there have been too many people at any given place on it.

Secondly, it is not possible to measure the significance of the earth by its position relative to another body, say the sun. What of the fact that the earth is not the fixed center of the solar system? The truth is that the sun, as a source of light and heat, serves as a public utility to the earth. Then which is the mistress and which the maid? Whoever heard of calling the furnace the center of the house? Are the hydro-people in town more central than the bakery? The hinge may be more "central" than the door which hangs and rotates on it; is it therefore more important? Stated less pictorially and perhaps more exactly, the insights of astrodynamics can afford us little or no insight into teleology.

Thirdly, whether people like it or not, the earth is their base of operations. The seven astronauts, who may be our first space travellers if all goes well, will take off from the earth, but only if they return to it will their mission be regarded as anything but tragedy. Space travel in a sense only accentuates "the centrality of the earth" (cf. M. J. Heineken, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-141).

The Bible and the Earth

"Sentiments of great strength held many intelligent men to the belief that our planet, the place of Christ's sacrifice, *must* be the centre of all things." The men referred to by the author of these words (Prof. Crane Brinton, *The Shaping of the Modern Mind*, p. 89) are sixteenth-century churchmen, Roman Catholic and Protestant alike, who opposed the revolutionary ideas of Copernicus. The question to be raised now is whether it was loyalty to the Bible or perhaps unconscious servitude to Aristotle that accounts for this opinion of the theologians.

What *does* the Bible say about the earth? It is mentioned, as the reader knows, in the very first line of the first page: In the beginning God created "heaven and earth" — the totality of things visible and invisible. Genesis 1 tells us that the earth was prepared, stage by stage, to serve as a suitable home for man. "The heavens are the heavens of Jehovah; but the earth hath he given to the children of men" (Ps. 115:16). Its unique importance lies in its being the living quarters and the workshop of man. It is the stage for the great drama of God acting with a supporting cast of human antagonists and protagonists. Somewhere on this planet we can put up a sign that says "The Son of God slept here."

The earth is, therefore, an elect planet, as the Hebrew people were an elect people, as Bethlehem was an elect town, as Mary was an "elect lady," and as the Church of Jesus Christ is now elect (described in Revelation 12:1 in these astronomic terms: "a woman arrayed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars"). The earth is elect in the purposes of God. It is chosen for a special purpose: the abode of man at work or at rest. And for all we know, it is the only inhabited planet in this inconceivably large universe.

But are we justified in calling the earth in any sense "central"? Does the Bible allow for this designation or perhaps require it? The answer, it seems, is No.

The Bible, in poetic but still revelational or truth-conveying language, calls the earth "God's footstool" (Is. 66:1; Matt. 5:35; Acts 7:49). That is to say, it is not the throne of God but a subsidiary piece of furniture. Its place in the Kingdom of God is one of subordination. Its importance is not in itself but in its relationship to the throne of God. To make it central is to deprive it of its true significance.

Further, though the earth is the living quarters of mankind, this bare description needs qualification. From the Bible it is clear that the earth as it is now, this sin-contaminated, demon-infested planet (cf. *The Silent Planet* by C. S. Lewis) is no more than the temporary living quarters of man. Believers are pilgrims on earth. Their minds are ori-

ented to the City Beyond, whose maker and builder is God and He alone (Heb. 11:13-16). Our Lord has gone ahead to prepare "a place" for His disciples (John 14:2).

The Bible gives no warrant known to this writer for speaking of the earth's centrality. Luther and Calvin were not in good form when they spoke harshly and with disdain of the ideas of Copernicus (Heineken, *op. cit.*, pp. 18, 19). There is not a page in Scripture devoted to the description of an earth-centered cosmology.

A Substitute Expression?

If we are to think in Biblical categories, we shall have to speak, not in terms of the centrality of the earth, but in terms of the unity of heaven and earth.

This is evident from the beginning of the Bible. For God created "heaven and earth." God, but not heaven, transcends the space-time complex. God as sovereign is about His kingdom; but His throne, however invisible, lies in the same order of things as His footstool. There is distinction between them but no disjunction; or if disjunction, it is within a larger conjunction. If we have no deistic God, we certainly do not have a deistic heaven. The terms "above" and "below" in Scripture, though they do not provide us with a topography of creation, are meaningful nonetheless as suggesting precisely this disjunction between the abode of God and the abode of man, both of which, it is to be noted, fall within the same created order of things. Being part of the creation, heaven also shares in the history and movement of all things (Matt. 5:18; for this paragraph and the next, cf. K. Schilder, *Heaven — What Is It?* Chs. IV, V, and VI).

This unity of heaven and earth is even plainer at the end of the Bible. There we read of a transfer of the abode of God to the earth as the abode of redeemed mankind. "I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride. . . . Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men" (Rev. 21:1-3ff.). Now the conjunction of heaven and earth is again visible; and since the glory of God's abode has "come down" to earth and the glory of the kings of the earth (v. 21) has been concentrated here, we may even speak of the earth as a focal point of future glory quite apart from its topographical location in the universe.

The unity of heaven and earth is presupposed throughout the Scriptures. Heaven is the launching station for all the great redemptive deeds of God; correspondingly, though in subordination for the time being, the earth is the receiving station of the redemptive and revelational acts and energies of God.

This unity of heaven and earth is strikingly apparent in two redemptive Events commemorated at this time of the year: the Ascension of our Lord and Pentecost.

The Ascension of our Lord is that Event in which He took our human nature, body and spirit, to heaven with Him. To Him all authority *in heaven and on earth* had been given; in keeping with this centralization of authority in His hands, He ascends to His throne. Christ ascended to heaven in order to exercise His authority, like a general who might climb a hilltop to establish headquarters at a vantage point overlooking the whole of the clashing armies below. The word "Ascent" has been dismissed as metaphor by some theologians, since it is obvious to them that heaven lies outside the space-time complex of the earth and its fellow-travelling bodies. In the Bible the Ascension of our Lord is not obviously non-spatial; on the contrary, our Lord's feet left the ground and His hands were outstretched in priestly benediction (Luke 24:51) and "as they were looking, he was taken up." Is it then too much to say that our Lord pioneered in space travel in a way that makes our present-day astronautic ventures look like an ugly caricature? The cloud which removed Jesus from our view calls a halt to curiosity and bids faith take over. But if our curiosity keeps on looking up, there appear two messengers of God, in the twinkling of an eye, to tell us that the return voyage will be no less visible.

The second redemptive Event demonstrating the unity of heaven and earth is the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit. There are only ten earth-days between the Ascension and Pentecost. This implies that the space voyage of Jesus did not take Him so many light-years away to the outermost rim of the spatial universe to bring Him to that Center from which He could effectively take command of His Church. At any rate, now that in Christ our body is in heaven and the Holy Spirit on earth, the unity of heaven and earth is forever guaranteed.

The Argument from Inspiration to Infallibility

by Dewey J. Hoitenga, Jr.

"INFALLIBILITY" AND "INSPIRATION" are answers to two questions which, I think, ought to be clearly distinguished from one another. The first question is this: "What is the truth-status of the Bible?" Infallibility is an answer to this question. The second question is: "How did the Bible come into being?" Inspiration is an answer to this question. These are two different questions — about the same object, to be sure: the contents of a book, the Bible; but different questions, nevertheless, about those contents. The first question concerns their reliability; the second the process by which they came to be. In this article I would like to examine the argument that proceeds from inspiration to infallibility, because I believe that such an examination will reveal the failure of this argument to provide the firm basis for infallibility that we need.

In his reference to this argument in the December 1959 issue of *The Reformed Journal*, Dr. Lewis Smedes points up the relevance of the "facts of scripture" themselves to the conclusion of this argument. He is concerned not so much to object to the argument as such, but only to convince us that it is not, as a deductive argument, the only kind of argument that might bear on the meaning and truth of its conclusion. Another kind of argument, he is saying, bears on the truth of the conclusion too — an inductive argument: beginning with the "facts of scripture" and letting them shed their light upon it. Though I believe we cannot, in the long run, escape the importance of Dr. Smedes' recommended method, it is not this method I wish to follow in the present article. This is because I think we ought first to ask ourselves whether, indeed, the deductive argument we have been using to reach that conclusion is the one we really want to use. To help us focus on this question, then, is my primary purpose here. Only after determining what deductive argument is the proper one to use will it be fruitful as well as necessary to hold up its conclusion before the light of the "facts of scripture."

I. The Argument Stated

Let us first of all be clear on just what the common argument from inspiration to infallibility is. The argument is, in its briefest form: Scripture is inspired by God, therefore scripture is infallible. In this form (enthymeme) the argument has only one premise: "Scripture is inspired by God." But a

deductive argument involves at least two premises, one of which, though assumed, is often not expressed. That other premise in this case, which is required to make the argument complete, is this: "All writings inspired by God are infallible." This other premise, it should be carefully noted, is a general statement which might be equally well formulated as follows: "If there is any writing inspired by God, it must be infallible." This premise differs, therefore, from the expressed premise, namely, "The scriptures are inspired by God," which is by contrast a particular statement claiming divine inspiration for a specific book, the Bible. The complete argument, at any rate, may be set forth as follows (let us call it argument *P* for the sake of later reference):

All writings inspired by God are infallible;
The Bible is a writing inspired by God;

Therefore: The Bible is infallible.

Looking at this argument we would be inclined to say that if the two premises are accepted, the conclusion follows naturally. So if the conclusion is the one we want to prove, this argument would seem to give us the right premises with which to do it. But I believe it can be shown that both of these premises *as premises* are dubious foundations upon which to build the infallibility of the Bible.

II. The Argument Examined: The First Premise

When I say that these premises are dubious as premises, I do not talk of their logical unsuitability. Indeed, the formal validity of the argument as it stands must be granted. Nor am I questioning the premises because I feel that the conclusion is dubious, so that my interest in the premises is dictated by my dislike of the conclusion that seems to follow. On the contrary, it is just because I want that conclusion established beyond the shadow of a doubt that I consider it of the utmost importance for us to ask anew whether the premises we have been relying upon can really do this for us. Let me proceed to tell why I feel that these premises are unequal to the task we have given them.

Take the major premise first: the general claim that if something is a writing inspired by God, it must be infallible. On what grounds do we hold this to be true and beyond all doubt? I think we tacitly presuppose a previous argument in which this proposition here being examined as a premise

emerges there as a conclusion deduced from other premises. The first of these other premises is a laudable one. It is the premise which asserts the infallibility of God in all that He says and does. This is the premise upon which, it seems to me, any argument concluding the infallibility of scripture eventually must be seen to rest. It must be, therefore, a completely indubitable premise, one which is absolutely certain, one the denial of which would be a self-contradiction. Is it this kind of premise? I believe it is. It is, if we are willing to grant that absolute perfection is part of the very meaning of the term "God," and that infallibility in everything He says and does is implied in this absolute perfection. For God to speak and act, in other words, is for Him to speak and act without deception and mistake; so that if a deceptive word or deed ever occurs, we may take its deceptiveness as conclusive evidence that this word or deed did not proceed from God. This, I believe, we are willing to grant.

Now the next question is, by what second premise, added to this one, can we obtain the conclusion: "Any writing inspired by God is infallible"? That second premise must be this: "Writings inspired by God are among His doings." This would give the following completed argument (let us call it argument Q):

God in all that He says and does is infallible;
Writings inspired by God are among His doings;

Therefore: Writings inspired by Him are infallible.

But is this a valid argument? I do not think it is. I do not think it is a valid argument if the conclusion is taken as true without any qualification whatever. For one of the canons of the valid syllogism is this, that if one of the premises is negative in "quality" or contains an "exclusion," the conclusion likewise must be negative in "quality" or contain the "exclusion." And I think it can be shown that the "quality" of the second premise, though not categorically negative, is at least partially so. And this partial negation or exclusion in the premise does not allow a valid conclusion not so qualified. Let us study the premise to see if it is as I have described.

The premise states: "God-inspired writings are among His doings." This means that we cannot define (understand) "God-inspired writings" apart from the notion given us by "a divine doing." But this does not imply that we can define (understand) "God-inspired writings" in terms of the notion "a divine doing" *alone*. Indeed, the complete meaning or definition of a "God-inspired writing" requires an exclusion from the notion "a divine doing." (Notice that this is not true of the first premise, of the relationship between "God" and "infallible.") A God-inspired writing is not a divine doing at all in so far as it is the doing of human authors. And in so far as a God-inspired writing is a human

doing, its characteristics are not determined by God's involvement but by man's. In so far as a God-inspired writing is a human doing, its very meaning must be obtained by excluding from it the notion of "a divine doing" and adding to it the notion of "a human doing."

This exclusion is of the greatest importance as far as the *validity* of the argument is concerned. For the canon of the syllogism referred to above is that if one premise contains an exclusion, the conclusion must also contain an exclusion. This canon envisions, of course, a categorical and complete exclusion; but it holds for the only partial exclusion of our premise as well. Even the partial exclusion of our premise must reappear in the conclusion for the argument as a whole to remain valid. The only way to make the argument (Q) valid is to make this exclusion explicit in both the premise and the conclusion, as follows: Writings inspired by God (except in so far as they are also the doings of men) are infallible. Or, in complete logical form, like this (let us call it argument R):

God in all that He says and does is infallible;
Writings inspired by Him are among His doings;

But: Writings inspired by Him are also in a sense excluded from His doings;

Therefore: Writings inspired by Him (in so far as they are His doings) are infallible;

But also: With respect to writings inspired by Him in so far as they are excluded from His doings, the premises entitle us to no valid conclusion concerning their fallibility or infallibility.

The crucial difficulty, then, in our attempt to obtain deductively the infallibility of divinely inspired writings from the infallibility of God (argument Q) stems from a recognition of the human involvement that is required in addition to the divine for the production of these writings (argument R). The important question is: does the recognition of this human involvement in the premise affect the categorical force of the conclusion or not? The answer to this important question will involve still another premise, one that concerns just whether the recognition of human involvement materially affects the argument or not. I have suggested that a recognition of human involvement does materially affect the argument, and that if this is admitted, the original deduction (Q) becomes invalid. It may be objected that the recognition of human involvement is not material to the argument; if not, however, this constitutes a premise requiring defense. Whoever makes the objection, that is, must prove that the connotation of fallibility which generally belongs to the notion of "human involvement" is necessarily lacking in the specific case of the meaning of "divinely inspired writings." He must show us, in other words, that the meaning of "divinely

inspired writings" is necessarily complete and necessarily unconditioned by any reference to that aspect of human involvement in anything which we call fallibility. But has this ever been done? I do not think so; and unless it can be done, are we not justified in taking the term "human involvement" in its common connotations, and then following any argument including a necessary reference to it wherever that argument may lead?

III. Examination of the Second Premise

The second premise of the main argument (*P*) is the assertion that the Bible is a God-inspired writing. Let us first be reminded what sort of assertion this is by contrast with that made in the first premise. I hope it is clear that up until now we have been examining a completely general proposition: "If any writing is God-inspired, it must be infallible." We were analyzing, that is, the concept of "God-inspired writings" in the abstract to see what would necessarily follow from it; we were not talking about any actually existing writings. Quite different from this, when we examine the second premise we are dealing with a particular assertion about a concrete, actually existing group of writings, namely, the Hebrew-Christian *Bible*. And the assertion that the second premise makes about this body of writings is that it is God-inspired, that it is a member of the general class entitled "God-inspired writings." Indeed, I think when we make this premise, we intend to claim also that the Bible is the only member of that class—but this will not affect the examination I wish us to make of the assertion as a premise in the main argument.

Now the questions we must ask about this premise, as in the case of the first premise, are: Is it indubitable? and if so, how does it receive its indubitable character? We would all agree that this premise is beyond doubt. It is not the assertion made in this premise which is in dispute among us, nor do I wish to dispute its truth as an assertion. What I do question is its value as a premise in the argument, which is something quite different. The revealing question in our examination of this premise is really the second one: why is this premise beyond all doubt among us? The answer we give to this query is the following: "Because the Bible itself says so in II Timothy 3:16." This text (together with related ones) seems to be the only source of information we have on this point. Again, however, we must think over this answer that we give. If we consider, we shall see that this reason we give for the truth of the second premise in the main argument (*P*) is itself a premise in another deductive argument. This other, presupposed argument is one in which another premise besides this one, required to complete the deduction, is being assumed though left unexpressed. What premise

is it that, when joined with the one expressed, will give us a valid deduction of this premise as its conclusion? It is the premise: "Statements in the Bible are indubitable." The complete argument (*S*):

Statements in the Bible are indubitable;

II Timothy 3:16 is a statement in the Bible;

Therefore: II Timothy 3:16 is indubitable.

No one, I think, will care to dispute the validity of this argument (as we did in the case of the argument presupposed by the first premise of *P*). This means that an examination of it can consist only in an answer to the question, how did we establish the truth of its premises? The truth of the second premise is hardly to be doubted; it has been established for us through the historical process called the development of the New Testament canon. To question its truth would require a thorough-going study of that process together with a defense of the assumption involved that the question of the canon is still an open one. But I do not think we are interested in that kind of investigation as a real threat to the truth of the second premise.

This leaves the first premise of argument *S* for our consideration: "Statements in the Bible are indubitable." What about this statement as a premise? How did we establish its truth? The answer is that we did not! For this statement turns out to be the very conclusion we are *trying* to establish in the main argument *P*! But here it appears as one of the premises in an argument (*S*) used to defend a premise in that main argument being used to establish it. The appreciation of this fact, it seems to me, is the most illuminating discovery of our whole study of the argument; even more arresting than the difficulties we experience in defending the first premise. The real shortcoming, in other words, of the whole argument (*P*) is less the deduction from the term "God-inspired writings" (though even that, I believe, is doubtful) than the *identification* of the Bible as a God-inspired writing. For this identification, as long as it is based on a Biblical text, presupposes the absolute reliability of that text. But the reliability or infallibility of that text is only one instance of the infallibility of the whole Bible, which is the very thing we are trying to establish. Put it another way: If II Timothy 3:16 is mistaken, the argument (*P*) that concludes infallibility on its basis must be mistaken; while if it is infallibly true, the argument (*P*) that concludes infallibility is not needed—at least in this case, for we must have determined the infallibility of this text by some means other than the argument. But if there is some other means than this argument for reaching the infallibility of this text (and others in which the Bible refers in a similar way to itself), there is certainly no reason

why we cannot employ this means in regard to any text of the Bible; so that if we are in possession of this other means, we do not need the argument, around which much of the recent discussion has centered, at all.

Conclusion

I conclude, then, that the deductive argument from inspiration to infallibility is not the argument to use if one wishes to establish infallibility beyond the shadow of a doubt. The argument fails not because it is itself invalid. It fails because the unqualified truth of its first premise is based upon a previous argument that is invalid; and because the truth of its second premise presupposes the truth of the conclusion, thereby making the argument fallacious. It fails, that is, because the divinely inspired writings of its first premise are inevitably also writings of men, so that as far as human authorship is allowed, infallibility cannot be included as a matter of self-evidence nor required as

a matter of logical necessity in the concept of these writings. And the argument fails because the identification in its second premise of the Bible as a divinely inspired writing, based as it must be upon Biblical texts, presupposes the truth of these texts; but the truth of these texts is comprehended in the conclusion which was to be proved by means of this identification as part of its foundation. If only one of its premises were doubtful with respect to its ability to prove the conclusion, this would be sufficient for us to call the argument a failure. But now both of its premises may be seen to be doubtful with respect to their ability to support the conclusion, and that makes the failure of the argument even more serious and complete.

If the truth-status (infallibility) of the Bible cannot be established by invoking a description of the process (inspiration) whereby the Bible claims to have come into existence, there must be another way. What this is I shall endeavor to show in a following article.

The Sovereignty of God (II)

by James Daane

IN THE FIRST of this series of articles on divine sovereignty, the definition of divine sovereignty as *causation* was considered, particularly as it has been developed by Professor C. Van Til in terms of an ultimate divine and a secondary human causation. It was shown that in his attempt to define divine sovereignty so as to protect both God's sovereignty and the meaningfulness of man's historical actions, God becomes the ultimate cause and man's act of faith the secondary cause of man's attainment to final glory. Professor Van Til writes: "Faith can be given as a reason for man's final glory just because believers were 'afore prepared unto glory'" (*Common Grace*, p. 67). Faith emerges not as a means unto salvation, but as a cause of it.

I am certain that Professor Van Til does not desire a doctrine of divine sovereignty which, by making faith a cause of salvation, runs counter to a Biblical theology of grace. What, then, accounts for this development in his theological thought? I suggest that there are two reasons why faith emerges as a cause rather than a means unto salvation.

First, a method that defines God's sovereignty in terms of a divine and a human causation is a method that compromises the sovereignty of God. Divine sovereignty is *God's* sovereignty. Its meaning, therefore, cannot be spelled out in terms of a divine *and* a human causation. When its meaning is spelled out in this fashion, the logic of the proce-

dures makes it a foregone conclusion that man's act of faith becomes a cause of his salvation. If the believer's act of faith must, to be meaningful, share in divine sovereignty defined as causation, then the idea of faith as a cause of salvation cannot be avoided. By this method divine sovereignty is compromised, and the truth of salvation by grace alone no less so.

Secondly, that faith becomes a cause of salvation stems from the method of defining sovereignty as bare causality, that is, *without reference to grace*. There is no *a priori* objection to using the concept of causality to understand the sovereignty of God. The Christian theologian is free to use any philosophical concept, if its usage helps clarify the Christian faith. A lively caution must, however, be exercised lest what may be the servants of Christian theology become lords over it. God may indeed be said to be a cause, but He is not a bare, unqualified cause. God is a *gracious* cause. Divine causality may therefore never be defined apart from grace. To do so is to reduce divine causality to the bare philosophical concept of causality. But God as a causative power is something quite other than this.

That God is a gracious cause is but an expression of His divine Fatherhood. God as Father may be said to be the cause of the eternal Son, and Father and Son may be said to be the cause of the eternal Spirit. This, however, is no bare causation but an

expression of the goodness and love of God. God may be said to be the cause of the world, but the divine creative action is no more a mere cause than the world, as the product of that activity, is a mere effect of this cause. Rather, this action of God is an expression of His goodness and self-giving love, even as, on another level, the divine fathering of the Son and the breathing forth of the Spirit are the fatherly divine actions of love and self-giving. God may be called a cause, but His causative actions are always those of a Father, i.e., of a God who in His nature and being is a Father and who can as such never in any of His works deny Himself.

It is precisely because God is a gracious cause (a Father) that His sovereignty may not be defined except in reference to grace. It is only where this is denied, and sovereignty is defined in terms of bare causality, that God can be said to be the cause of sin, man's faith an efficacious cause of his attainment to final glory, and reprobation something definable out of reference to sin, i.e., out of reference to man's rejection of the love and grace of God.

IT WAS SAID that a definition of God's sovereignty in terms of divine and human causation compromises the sovereignty of God because it makes man share in that sovereignty which belongs to God alone. The reader may ask, Is it not true that though God is the ultimate, man is also in some secondary or approximate sense an agent of causative power? Stated more simply, Does not God share His sovereignty with man when He grants to man dominion over the earth and to the Christian the privilege of reigning with Christ?

The answer is Yes. God does share His sovereignty with man. But this is a gracious divine act, one that cannot be properly understood apart from its gracious character. A proper understanding of this divine sovereignty in which man graciously shares can only occur within the context of grace and in reference to it. To ignore grace at this point, and define divine sovereignty merely in terms of bare causality, is to violate the very nature of grace and to withhold that thanks and praise which is God's due. Moreover, to define this divine sovereignty, in which God graciously allows man to share, without reference to grace, gives man's right to reign, his right to be a causative agent, an *independent* status. Here lie the makings of the autonomous man, a man who, possessing sovereignty not in a gracious manner but in a secondary as over against an ultimate manner, declares that his own act of faith is of such secondary sovereign causative power that it is a significant reason for his entrance into glory.

In Biblical thought man does not possess a secondary form of divine sovereignty as distinct from God's ultimate sovereignty, so that he possesses a

kind of independent sovereignty over against God. In Biblical thought man shares in that ultimate sovereignty — besides which there is none other — that sovereignty of *God* which God graciously shares with man. A theology of grace knows no ultimate divine sovereignty or causation as distinct from a secondary one. It knows only a God who is ultimately sovereign in the sense in which there is none other, one who in His *grace* shares *this* ultimate and only sovereignty with man. We conclude, therefore, that God does indeed share His sovereignty with man, but the nature of this shared sovereignty is not revealed when defined in reference to "ultimate" and "secondary." Its true nature comes to light only when defined in reference to grace.

If it be urged that faith may be called a "cause" of salvation because God graciously makes it to be such a cause, then the concept "cause" is given a new and strange theological meaning. The insistence that faith is a means but not a cause of the believer's salvation has always been one of the distinctives of Reformed thought. Confusion will be our lot if we speak of faith as a cause, howbeit a gracious cause of salvation.¹ It should also be observed that a divine sovereignty that would make faith a cause of salvation is also one which, by that very fact, could not be defined apart from grace.

A DEFINITION of God's sovereignty obtained without reference to grace is a definition of *neutral*, unqualified, absolute power, a power that accounts for all things but is itself qualified by nothing. Here lies the source for the erroneous principle of "equal ultimacy," namely, that God is *in the same manner* the sovereign cause of sin and faith, of election and reprobation, of salvation and damnation. Here lies the source for the contention that the self-contained God is, as such, the cause and the explanation of all things, and for the contention that the denial of this is a vote for the "autonomous man."

Here, too, lies the source for the claim that the Christian theologian may take his point of departure as well from reprobation as from election, as well from sin as from faith, from damnation as from salvation, or equally from each set of terms. I have on occasion urged that they who work with divine sovereignty regarded as unqualified absolute power and contend that this sovereign power is equally expressed in reprobation and election, etc., show a definite tendency to make their point of theological departure in reprobation rather than in election, in sin rather than in faith, in damnation rather than in salvation. This procedure is char-

1. Similarly, the meaning of "cause" as it relates to God's relationship to sin has never been ambiguous; the idea of cause has always carried the idea of responsibility, so that if God were the cause of sin He would also be responsible for it. The meaning of "cause," in this context, has been clear since the formulation of the Canons of Dort (1618-1619).

acterized by a fascination with the abyss of destruction, and it produces a theology of wrath rather than a theology of grace.

Professor C. Van Til has disowned this characterization of his own theology. The fact is, nevertheless, that he defines the sovereignty of God first in reference to sin, reprobation, and damnation, and *then* applies it to faith and salvation, with the result that man's act of faith becomes a cause of his entrance into final glory. Had Professor Van Til defined sovereignty first in reference to man's election and salvation, he would never have come to the idea that faith is a secondary cause of salvation. We have seen that when his conception of God's sovereignty is applied to faith and man's salvation it shows itself to be unacceptable. Does it appear more acceptable when he applies it to man's sin and reprobation?

"Sin," he writes, "can be given as the reason for man's destruction just because men were 'fitted for destruction' . . ." (*Common Grace*, p. 67). This statement occurs near the end of a long discussion concerning the sovereignty of God as ultimate causation and the meaningfulness of man's actions as significant secondary causes.

According to Professor Van Til, God is the ultimate cause and man the secondary cause of sin. Man's sin, he maintains, is meaningful only because behind it stands God as its ultimate cause. How, or in what sense, is God the ultimate cause of sin? In the sense that God willed reprobation, i.e., man's final destruction. It is divine reprobation that imparts to sin its secondary significance as a secondary cause.

This position is open to the following serious objections:

(1) The meaning of sin here derives from reprobation. It is both ultimately and secondarily significant only because of reprobation. Were there no reprobation, sin would not be sinful.

(2) Divine sovereignty thus defined in terms of reprobation and sin is meaningless and wholly inapplicable in the area of grace. If sin is meaningful only because behind it lies the ultimate divine causative power of reprobation, then the sins of the elect have no meaning. This consideration simply points up the truth that divine sovereignty defined apart from grace has no relevance or utility in the area of election and grace.

(3) To say that reprobation is the ultimate cause of the reality and meaning of sin is but another way of saying that God created (some) men in order to damn them. Classical Reformed theology has always rejected this, and the Conclusion of the Canons of Dort asserts that those who hold this "have violated all truth, equity, and charity, in wishing to persuade the public [that God] has created them [the reprobates] for this very purpose. . . ."

(4) If, as Professor Van Til asserts, "sin can

be given as the reason for man's destruction just because men were 'fitted for destruction,' and faith can be given as a reason for man's final glory just because believers were 'afore prepared unto glory,' then reprobation accounts for sin *in the same manner* as election accounts for faith. But this "equal ultimacy," this "in the same manner," the Reformed Churches have always rejected. In the Conclusion the Canons teach that the doctrine that "in the same manner in which the election is the fountain and the cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety" is a doctrine which "the Reformed Churches not only do not acknowledge, but even detest with their whole soul. . . ."

IF ONE LOOKED only at the assertion in the Conclusion that reprobation is not *in the same manner* the cause of sin as election is the cause of faith and good works, one might conclude that the divine will to reprobate is nevertheless *in some manner* the cause or explanation of sin. But this the Canons in their positive teaching explicitly deny when they assert: "The cause or guilt of this unbelief as well as of all other sins is no wise in God, but in man himself . . ." (Chap. I, Art. 5). The Canons teach explicitly not only that the divine sovereign act of reprobation is not the cause of sin in the same manner that election is the cause of faith, but also that God, and His sovereign act of reprobation, is in no sense the cause of sin. Professor Van Til therefore cannot find support in the Canons of Dort for the position that God is the ultimate cause of sin and the divine act of reprobation that which, and which alone, makes sin meaningful. The Rev. John Stek discovered the difficulties of attempting to support Professor Van Til's conception of sovereignty by an appeal to the Canons of Dort. As far as I know, Professor Van Til himself has not appealed to the Canons for support. He has appealed rather to the Westminster Confession.

In his *Defence of the Faith* Professor Van Til asserts, and without any qualification, that he accepts the principle of "equal ultimacy," and for support he appeals to Professor John Murray's interpretation of the Westminster Confession. Does the Westminster Confession support the view that reprobation is that ultimate divine act which makes sin meaningful?

Section VII of Chapter III of the Westminster Confession asserts: "The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice."

Professor Murray points out that reprobation, as expressed in the Westminster Confession, con-

sists of two parts: (1) a passing by, and (2) an ordination to dishonor and wrath. Professor Murray then proceeds to point out that the ordination to dishonor and wrath is a judicial act, an act of God's judgment upon the reprobate *because of his sin*. "The ground of dishonor and wrath," he says, "is truly sin and sin alone. . . ." But the passing by, he maintains, *has nothing to do with sin*. It is not a judicial act of God, not a divine judgment on sin. The ground for the passing by, he urges, is solely the sovereign good pleasure of God. It is an act of pure sovereignty, in no sense conditioned by the non-elect's sin. "The sovereign good pleasure of God is alone operative in the passing by."

In making this distinction the Westminster divines revealed, says Murray, their skills in subtle discrimination and their jealousy for the truth of God's sovereignty.

IS PROFESSOR MURRAY'S INTERPRETATION of the Westminster Confession an acceptable one? Does the Westminster Confession teach what Murray says it teaches? I make the following observations:

(1) Professor Murray admits that many interpreters of the Westminster Confession have overlooked the distinction he finds between a sovereign act of "passing by" that has no reference to sin and a sovereign act of "ordaining to wrath and dishonor" because of sin. But have they really overlooked it? Have they not, rather, interpreted the Westminster Confession in harmony with the classical Reformed tradition in which reprobation is *never* defined apart from sin, which is to say that God did not create men in order to reprobate them? Have not these interpreters merely agreed with the well-nigh universally accepted judgment that the Reformed Confessions reject both a reprobation that is unrelated to sin and a "creation unto damnation"?

(2) A passing by that is not a divine judgment upon the reprobate's sin is an expression of a wholly neutral sovereignty, one unrelated to grace and unrelated to sin. Such a passing by is neither an act of wrath nor an act of grace. It bespeaks a God who deals with a sinner neither in terms of grace nor of justice, but in a wholly non-moral manner. It need hardly be urged that the God of the Bible never acts in this fashion. The God of the Bible always acts in a moral manner. God as sovereign is free to extend or withhold grace from a sinner. But He is not free to be non-moral: to be neither gracious nor just. He is not free, as this conception of passing by asserts He is, to deal with a sinner as though he were not one, i.e., to deal with a sinner neither in grace nor in justice, for while this would not be a violation of grace, it would be a violation of justice. This notion of passing by violates the Biblical teaching that God is just in all His ways.

If Professor Murray's interpretation is correct,

then, but only then, can Professor Van Til appeal to the Westminster Confession. For only if the passing-by aspect of reprobation is a non-judicial act can Professor Van Til go further and contend that reprobation accounts for both the fact and the significance of sin.

(3) Such a non-judicial passing by is as abstract and meaningless as it is morally neutral. From a Biblical perspective there is no recognizable meaning in a divine act of rejection that is not an act of divine judgment. When God withholds His favor and grace from the sinner, He judges the sinner. God cannot *simply* pass by one whom He has created as a man passes by a stranger on the street. Only if God's sovereignty is utterly neutral can He pass a man by without expressing either grace or justice, without expressing in that moment His judgment. After all, this passing by is a part of *reprobation*, i.e., of rejection! Otherwise passing by becomes such a neutral thing, being neither an expression of divine grace nor of divine wrath, that it would seem to make little difference, indeed, really none at all, whether one is or is not passed by.

(4) The second part of reprobation, the divine ordination to dishonor and wrath, is grounded, Professor Murray asserts, in the reprobate's sin. But if the nature of God's absolute sovereignty is truly indicated by a passing by that is *not* grounded in the reprobate's sin, then is not the divine ordination that is grounded "in sin and sin alone" something less than absolutely sovereign? If passing by is explicable solely in terms of God as sovereign, of God-as-He-is-in-Himself, without reference to sin, has not sovereignty been abandoned in a divine ordination to dishonor and wrath that is grounded in sin and sin alone, and therefore explicable only in reference to sin?

(5) If Professor Murray's interpretation is correct, then the Westminster Confession differs from the Canons of Dort, for the latter explicitly teach that the passing by is grounded in the reprobate's sin, and that it is a judicial act of God upon that sin. The Canons declare, "He leaves the non-elect in his just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy" (Chap. I, Art. 6). They also declare that God "has decreed to leave [those passed by] in the common misery into which they have wilfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but permitting them in his just judgment to follow their own ways. . ." (Chap. I, Art. 15). And in their conclusion they declare the notion "that God, by a mere arbitrary act of his will, without the least respect or view to any sin, has predestinated the greatest part of the world to eternal damnation" to be detestable. What Professor Murray regards as the teaching of the Westminster Confession and an evidence of the jealousy of the Westminster di-

vines for the true sovereignty of God, the Canons regard as divine arbitrariness.

WE RETURN NOW to our primary concern. It was said above that if Professor Murray's interpretation of passing by is correct, then Professor Van Til can appeal to this aspect of the Westminster Confession's teaching about reprobation. But it must also be said that the Westminster's explanation of the second aspect of reprobation does *not* support Professor Van Til's concept of sovereignty. The ordination to "dishonor and wrath for *their sin*" (italics mine) violates his concept of sovereignty, for here the Confession defines sovereignty in reference to sin, and not solely in terms of God Himself, i.e., in terms of pure sovereignty. By defining one aspect of reprobation in reference to sin, and by asserting, as Professor Murray does, that the ground of the ordination to dishonor and wrath is "truly sin and sin *alone*," both the Professor and the Confession fall into what Dr. Van Til calls a "relational theology," a theology that capitulates to the autonomous man by failing to explain all things exclusively, sin and reprobation included, in terms of God alone. But if they have, so have the Canons of Dort, for they teach that the divine "passing by" is related to man's sin and is a "just judgment" of God upon it.²

The position that God is the ultimate cause of sin, and that His act of reprobation is the ultimate cause that alone makes sin a significant human action, expresses a concept of divine sovereignty that is no more acceptable in the area of sin and reprobation than it is in the area of faith and salvation, where it makes God the ultimate but man himself the secondary cause of his entrance into final glory. Indeed, this divine sovereignty, which is first reduced to divine causality and then employed to show the nature of God's sovereignty and the reality of man as a significant causative agent, turns matters upside down: not only does man become a significant cause of his own salvation, but God becomes a cause of sin, a God who by a decision of His sovereign good pleasure — quite apart from man's sin — fitted man for eternal destruction and thus makes sin meaningful. In the name of this conception of sovereignty, God creates men in order to damn them; sin has meaning and *rationale* only because of the eternal divine decision to make them fit for destruction. "Sin can be given as the reason for man's destruction just because men were 'fitted for destruction' . . ." — this I contend is no more an expression of the *Reformed* conception of God's sovereignty than is the remainder of this sentence: "and faith can be given as a reason for man's final glory just because believers were 'afore prepared unto glory.'"

2. In his *Defence of the Faith* (pp. 415, 416) Dr. Van Til asserts that my criticism of his position involves a criticism of the Westminster Confession. This may be. But in the same manner, and on the same point, his criticism of my position is a criticism of the Canons.

A PUBLIC LETTER

to the Rev. Jan Karel van Baalen

DEAR REV. VAN BAALEN:

Your remarks on the communion service (in the *Reformed Journal* for May 1960) were in the robust style that has characterized your writing and your personality throughout your distinguished ministry. The strong terms in which you reject the proposed revisions of our formulary for the Lord's Supper add flavor and vigor to your discussion. No one, I think, would want to deny you the "cut and thrust" tactics with which you enter debate. What I want to ask you now, though, is whether you gave the proposed revisions the *kind* of treatment that is really most helpful and constructive.

I had not expected you to give enthusiastic endorsement to the revisions. I have heard of the deep affection you have for the formulary that you have heard and read for many years; you have been quoted as calling it "the pearl of our liturgical forms." I did, however, expect from you the kind of careful and patient criticism that only a man with your liturgical experience could give us. On this you failed us somewhat, I think. Did you not let your devotion to the old formulary close your mind to the possibility that the revisions could have something to recommend them? And did you not give them a kind of back-of-the-hand dismissal?

Before reviewing your objections to the proposed revisions, I should say that my answer to these objections is not to argue for their acceptance by our churches. To achieve acceptance, the revisions must stand on their intrinsic merits of style and content and liturgical propriety. But I should, nonetheless, like to deal with your objections. Having done this, I want to appeal to you for a more thorough consideration of the revisions.

Your first objection is directed at the second of the two proposed revisions. (The reader will recall that Synod has made two revisions available to the churches for a trial period of four years; in 1963 Synod will make its decision regarding them.) You observe that the second proposed revision provides for two separate formularies, the first is an exhortation to self-examination, the second a communion formulary proper. You say that this revision "splits" the old form into "two halves." Having stated your objection to this, you dismiss the revision with a gesture: "Thus *exit* Proposal Number II."

But, venerable friend, this revision does not "split" the form. It re-writes it so as to create two distinct and unified formularies that are intended for use on two distinct and different occasions. We have a Preparatory Exhortation to be read on Preparatory Sunday. We have a Communion Formulary to be read on Communion Sunday. Each of the two formularies is a whole, fitting for its distinct purpose. Is this not logical? Is it not proper?

The propriety of having two distinct formularies, a preparatory and a communion formulary, does not in itself

commend the revisions. They have to be studied and used so that we can discover whether *these* formularies are acceptable. Neither, however, ought we to dismiss them merely on this count. There is a great deal more to be said for them, and possibly against them, than the formal fact of their being two.

Having waved aside revision Number I, you turn your attention to revision Number II. This one gets an almost equally hasty brush-off. You reject this revision because it does not require, but makes optional, the reading of the familiar list of sins that bar a person from the Lord's Table. You contend that we need the warning implied in the list of sins.

We undoubtedly do need this warning, but the question is whether the list must therefore be included in the formulary. Is it not at least equally advisable to leave the warning against concrete, specific sins to the preacher who knows his congregation's particular weaknesses? Besides, is not any list bound to be incomplete? And are not the sins listed in the form less pointed in their warning today than was formerly the case? How frequently have you found it necessary to warn your people recently against invoking dead saints, angels, or other creatures? Or against sorcery, fortune-telling, and charms? You are alive to the times; you dare say that you have found more tempting sins to warn against than these. But, apart from this particular matter, I ask you whether you have no comments to make on any of the other features of this revision?

You have one additional complaint to make, a formal one, and this against both proposed revisions. You object to what you call "a liturgical and historical blunder" of separating the Creed from the prayer. But is this really a blunder? Is it not the recognition of a proper and, may I say, obvious distinction? The Apostles' Creed is one thing; a prayer is another. The Creed is closely related to prayer, indeed. But, apart from our old formulary, it has always served a different liturgical function than prayer. Do we use the Creed as part of a prayer in any of our other liturgies? Was it not, perhaps, a "liturgical blunder" to have incor-

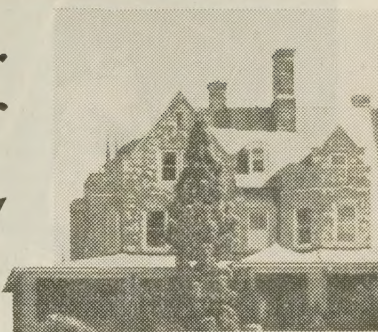
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porated the Creed into the prayer in the first place?

On these three grounds, then, you advise the churches to reject the proposed revisions of our formulary. In your argument you do not find it much necessary to enter into the material changes that the revisions make. For instance, you object to separating the Creed from the prayer, but you do not discuss at all the revision of the prayer itself. Your remarks look to me like your first and immediate reaction to the most obvious changes made in the old formulary. Let me urge you to give the revisions a more patient study. I do not ask you to be unfaithful to your devotion to the old formulary. I ask you only to be open to the possibility that some merit, as well as some fault, may be found in the new ones.

The other things you said in your article reveal you as a person who can approach the revisions with objectivity and with a liturgical sense. Your observations show that you appreciate the centrality of the actual sacrament in the communion service. Your practical suggestions for making the whole service more impressive are good, and they show that you are willing to experiment with new ways in search of better ways. Surely you are able to do this with the revised formularies too. With your mature perspective, you can be of real

service to the church in this matter which touches its worship at the most significant of its services. Take another, longer look at the revisions, then, and consider the several significant modifications of the old form that they make.

For instance, notice how the sentence structure has been simplified so that the sentences can be easily read and understood. Notice also the many archaic expressions that have been changed. More important, notice that the objective character of the sacrament as a means of grace is emphasized more adequately than it is in the old form. Notice, particularly in the second revision, the addition of a more pastoral element in the Preparatory Exhortation and an eschatological element in the Communion Formulary. These and other aspects of the revisions,

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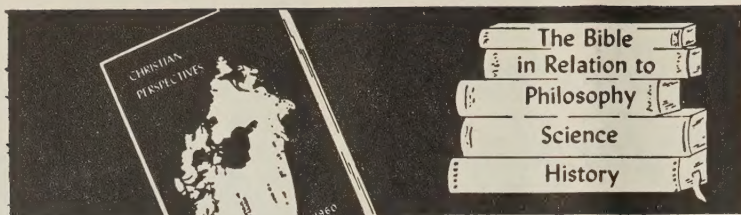
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as well as the total impression that each makes, must be considered in our evaluation of the new formularies.

I hope that you and others will consider all these factors in the revisions, and that as time goes on you will come back in print with another criticism of them. The Synod has given us plenty of time in which to become well acquainted with the proposed revisions and in which to discuss them. So, do not let your remarks be your last. Come back with the same vigor and frankness that we anticipate from you. But come next time with the considered and patient judgment that we have a right to ask of you.

Sincerely,

LEWIS B. SMEDES

DEAR READER,

Will you work with us for the honour of God's Holy Name? "Naturally," you will respond, "that is my duty as a Christian." It is not to be denied that in many so-called Christian nations God's Name is used in vain. And what are we doing about it? Generally we are silent, which of course is not right. We are called of God to uphold His Name. Our silence has continued too long already.

In many lands organizations have been formed to assist the individual believer to uphold the proper use of God's Name. And also here in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, discussions have taken place between ministers and members of various churches to consider the possibility of organizing such a society.

We would like to have the reactions of the readers of this paper as to how they consider this idea. The intention is to use the following means to attain the goal of promoting the proper use of God's Name:

- (a) By placing wall plaques "Use the Lord's Name, but not in vain" in as many public places as possible.
- (b) By issuing seals with same inscription for letters, cards, etc.
- (c) By means of matches with the above slogan printed on the covers and by tracts, transparencies and any other way possible.

Further, this organization would be a non-profit organization of which anyone may become a member.

May we hear from you in the near future, so that perhaps something can be done?

FEDERATION TO UPHOLD THE PROPER
USE OF GOD'S HOLY NAME

Box 513 A.D.
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DEAR EDITORS,

Congratulations on your centenary issue. I trust that you may live to see the centennial issue.

You have demonstrated that it is possible to combine literary skill and independent, courageous research with simple and childlike faith in God.

The Bible tells us that the ways of God are past finding out. No one who has looked into the mysteries of the physical world or of the mind of man will doubt that the path of discovery is endless. Your magazine is dedicated to the ever new discovery of the ways of God in the affairs of men.

I admire all your regular contributors, but I express special affection for Van Baalen's article in the March issue. J. K. van Baalen was a fresh influence in the life of the Christian Reformed Church when he first came to it from Holland, and he has been an invigorating force ever since.

Sincerely,

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Champaign, Illinois

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